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19 October 1966

Dr. Francis Crick  
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The Medical School  
Hills Road  
Cambridge, England

Dear Francis,

I am naturally disappointed in your letter of October 10, 1966.  
Let me comment on several of the points you raise.

(1) Your argument that my book contains far too much gossip and not enough intellectual comments misses entirely what I have tried to do. I never intended to produce a technical volume aimed only at historians of science. Instead, I have always felt that the story of how the interactions of me, you, Maurice, Rosalind, Bragg, Linus Pauling, Peter P., etc., finally knitted into the double helix was a very good story which the public would enjoy knowing. Moreover, since the discovery was one of the great moments in the science of this century, I believe the argument can be made that the general public has a right to know how it all happened. Thus, I tried to write it in such a way that it could be understood by the large audience of intelligent people who would like to read something about how science occurs but who do not have the technical competence to get thrown at them problems, like the strength and specificity of ionic bonds, etc.

(2) Someday, perhaps you or Maurice, but if not, some graduate student in search of a Ph.D. will write a balanced scholarly historical work which takes into account all of the relevant facts, many discovered by me only after the structure came out. Since this was not my purpose, I should not be blamed for not doing so. Quite purposefully I tried to recreate my first impressions of you, Bragg, Cambridge, etc., because only in this way could I try and tell people how our brand of science was done.

(3) I do not consider my book defamatory in the slightest toward you. You have a strong personality, which cannot be avoided if one is to write how you do science. In the early Cambridge days, there were people who thought you talked too much for what they considered your limited ability and insight. But as they were all wrong, I cannot see what harm it does to say that your amazingly productive career

always did not have the support of everyone. In this you are not at all unique, for often being successful demands stating that the work and approaches of the past are outdated. Personally, as you know well, I almost never could hear you speak too much because of the creative intelligence and common sense you brought to bear upon almost everything which interested me.

(4) My view that the book is not in the slightest defamatory toward you has been shared by all of the fifty or so people who have so far read the final draft or one of the earlier versions. About half of these people know you, and like you. None of them have encouraged me not to publish, in fact, just the opposite. Exactly the same favorable impressions have come from a fairly diverse group of reasonable people, who are completely out of science (e.g. the MIT economist Paul Samuelson, the new head of our new Kennedy Institute of Politics, Dick Neustadt, the head of the Guggenheim Foundation, Gordon Ray, (see enclosed letter) and Carl Kaysen, the former Kennedy staff man now Oppenheimer's successor at Princeton). Each has very strongly urged me to publish in virtually the form shown to you.

(5) I am particularly pleased that Harvard University Press intends to publish it, for it confirms my belief that I have not turned out a low-grade compendium of unnecessary gossip. Indeed, I hope that it may be judged a serious literary effort, to which I can feel satisfied about having devoted approximately a year in writing and final preparation in a form suitable for publication.

(6) I feel most firmly that the book should be published soon, not condemned to an underground existence which would automatically generate the impression that some unprintable scandal exists which a variety of people would like to keep quiet. I strongly believe that its publication will reveal to the world that science can be fun and will let a small section of the youth of this world grow up hoping that they can do science in the manner of our early Cambridge days.

Thus it is my serious hope that you will gentlemanly, though obviously not enthusiastically, accept its publication and that the ugly spectacle of a Crick-Watson duel will not ooze out into the public world.

With the usual best regards to Odile,

Yours sincerely,

J.

J. D. Watson

JDW:eob